

Mississippi Gulf Coast Oil Spill Disaster Recovery Summit

CARRI was a presenting sponsor of the June 30 Mississippi Gulf Coast Oil Spill Disaster Recovery Summit, organized by South Mississippi Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (SMVOAD) and University of South Mississippi's Center for Policy and Resilience (USM-CPR). The day-long Summit, held at USM Gulf Coast's Gulf Park campus in Long Beach, emphasized that the Gulf Coast oil spill disaster will profoundly affect the environment, the economy, and the well-being of Mississippi Gulf Coast citizens and that long-term recovery must start now.

SMVOAD partnered with USM-CPR in this Summit to identify the range of possible impacts and begin to develop community wide strategies to respond to and recover from this unique disaster. The Summit Management Team included representatives of MS Coast Interfaith Disaster Task Force, Lutheran Episcopal Services in Mississippi, International Relief and Development – U.S. Gulf Coast Community Resource Centers, American Red Cross Mississippi Gulf Coast Chapter, United Way of South Mississippi, and USM-CPR, while a larger Planning Committee ensured input from an even more broad-based group.

The Summit attracted some 200 registrants. Organizers invited representatives of diverse organizations, including businesses, government, health and human service providers, faith-based voluntary groups, and other nongovernmental organizations and associations, to collaborate in developing needed recovery strategies. They especially welcomed representatives of fishing, tourism, and other industries and groups particularly affected by this disaster.

Organizers envisioned this Summit as the first of a series and having the following primary goals:

- Identify key types and scale of potential long term impacts of this disaster on Mississippi Gulf Coast residents, businesses, and the coastal environment.
- Develop strategic partnerships to address these needs in follow-up meetings.
- Provide input for a joint policy statement on the necessary resources to address primary needs associated with recovery.
- Provide input for a long term recovery plan, including regional partnerships and one or more Regional Summits.

The morning session of the Summit brought together panels of national, state, and local experts to identify and explore key issues and expected needs for long term recovery. The panels addressed environmental, economic, and emotional and health impacts and provided opportunity for questions and comments from other Summit participants. Steven Picou, Ph.D., University of South Alabama, was the featured keynote speaker at the luncheon hosted by USM. He described the results of two decades of research on impacts to coastal Alaskan communities following the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill and what is known about the differences between natural and technological disasters. The afternoon session presented a coordinated approach advocated by SMVOAD to assess

the effects experienced by residents and to collaborate in providing services to facilitate long-term recovery.

LaDon Swann, PhD, Director of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, moderated the first morning panel, which focused on forecasting long-term impacts on the environment. He also educated participants on expected impacts of the oil spill on the life cycle of common Gulf of Mexico oysters. Harriet Perry and Jim Franks, with USM's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, presented information about estuarine-dependent organisms, using the blue crab life cycle as a focal example, as well as expected impacts on off-shore ecosystems, with emphasis on the sargassum seaweed that provides nurseries for species such as blue-fin tuna, amberjack, dolphinfish, blue marlin, and sailfish.

Tom Lansford, Ph.D., Academic Dean of the Gulf Coast, and Professor of Political Science, University of South Mississippi, moderated a panel focused on economic impacts. It featured Scott King, Director of Policy and Research with Gulf Coast Business Council, and Earnest Ulrich, owner of Port City Cafe in Gulfport, MS.

John Hosey, MDiv, with MS Coast Interfaith Disaster Task Force, moderated the third panel, which explored long-term impact on emotional and physical health. Panelists included Benjamin Springgate, MD, MPH, with Tulane University School of Medicine, RAND Gulf States, and the REACH-NOLA Mental Health Infrastructure and Training Project; Gabriel Nehrbass, program specialist with Save the Children; Grayson Norquist, MD, MSPH, Professor and Chairman Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior with the University of Mississippi Medical Center; and William Smith, M.D., with Singing River Hospital.

Following Dr. Picou's luncheon presentation, John Hosey invited BP's new Government & Public Affairs Coordinator for Mississippi, Margaret Laney, to speak. She stressed that businesses and residents should move forward with their claims and expressed gratitude for the opportunity provided by this Summit for BP staff to listen and learn.

Lori West, Gulf Region Director of International Relief and Development, Inc. – US, presented a model developed by SMVOAD, emphasizing the importance of activating a Long-Term Recovery Committee. She advocated a collaborative "Neighbor Helping Neighbor" approach to assess needs, identify existing services to meet those needs, fill service gaps, and deliver those services.

The Summit then provided time for attendees to ask additional questions or comment on their own experience or services provided by their organizations. At least one attendee, not from the Mississippi coast, shared that he was particularly impressed with the proactive, collaborative spirit of the Summit. Attendees completed forms relating to services they could provide to those in need, along with evaluations of the Summit itself. Summit organizers agreed to organize future activities based on those responses.

For additional information about the Summit, including links to presentations, please visit: <http://www.smvoad.com/Gulf-Coast-Oil-Spill-Recovery-Summit.html>